

# **SPEECH AT THE NEW YEAR RECEPTION HOSTED BY THE PRESIDENT OF THE STATE OF ISRAEL.**

28 December 2015

*Your Excellency, Mr. President,*

*Respected Members of the Government,*

*Beloved Heads of the Churches of the Holy Land,*

*Fellow Leaders of other Religious Communities,*

*Ladies and Gentlemen,*

In this festive season, when our many religious communities celebrate their feasts and when we mark the turn of the year, on behalf of the Churches and Christian communities of the Holy Land, we greet you, Mr. President, and we wish to express our gratitude to you for the strong stand you have continued to take in demonstrating respect for all religions and for the religious diversity of our region.

You have often said that you are the President for all the peoples who call Israel their home, and that the whole human family are the children of the One God. You have defended the rights of minorities in this country, and you have condemned the use of violence from whatever side it comes, especially in the current situation.

We who represent the Christian communities of the Holy Land

join you in these affirmations and condemnations. We understand the integrity of this region to lie in a healthy diversity of ethnic and religious traditions in which there is true co-existence with mutual respect and security for all and we reject all forms of violence and terrorism, no matter the circumstances. It is absolutely unacceptable to use religion in this way, and in this season of light and peace, we wish to reaffirm our commitment to work for peace and reconciliation in our beloved Holy Land.

Recently at a meeting with the Chief Rabbinate of Israel, we remarked that human beings are created in the image and likeness of God and this truth is the foundation for our understanding of the human person. But more than this, by extension we must also say that not only do we share a common humanity that is a mirror to us of God; we are also created of the same earth.

We went on to say that the earth belongs to all, and this particular earth of the Holy Land is not only our common home, it is our common origin. According to the Book of Genesis, we were "formed from the dust of the earth" (Gen. 2:7), and this common origin must be a reminder that we are united in a new common purpose to work together for the well-being and the flourishing of all who call the Holy Land their home and Jerusalem their spiritual capital.

In this regard, our mission has been precisely this, in safeguarding and serving the spiritual richness and beauty of Jerusalem, which is the embodiment of sacred history that is shared by Jews, Christians and Muslims alike. Jerusalem is a home of worship, and our mission throughout the ages has been to ensure this special and unique character by upholding the provisions of the Status Quo, which remains the key to harmony and peace, and also to respecting the legitimate privileges and rights that history has accorded to us.

It is in this framework that we can find a renewed unity of

identity and purpose. For this reason reconciliation and unity are fundamental to building trust and lasting peace.

Allow us to reiterate our commitment to education, an education that is based on the principles and moral values that derive from our common heritage in the Scriptures, which we are promoting through our schools. It is well known that education based on such values and principles is of paramount significance in shaping our social fabric.

As we greet you for the New Year, Mr. President, we assure you of our commitment to maintaining accessibility to the Holy Places for the thousands of pilgrims who are coming to the Holy Land. Their yearning for spiritual nourishment is met in the Holy Sites, which are primarily places of worship.

We take this blessed opportunity to wish you a peaceful New Year, and we pray for God's blessing on our beloved Holy Land.

Thank you.

His Beatitude

**THEOPHILOS III**

Patriarch of Jerusalem